CHAPTER 12

SHRUBS

Common Juniper

Juniperus communis • Cupressaceae

This easily recognized dwarf shrub occurs throughout most of North America and Europe in open woods, subalpine meadows and alpine fell fields. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs only on tephra, blown-down sites and lahars, never on primary surfaces. This evergreen shrub rarely exceeds 50 cm in height. Mats can exceed 3 m wide and be so dense as to inhibit other plants. The bark is thin, brown to red and sheds easily. Leaves are sharp, stiff, prickly needles arrayed in triplets, with waxy coatings. Fruits form blue-back "berries." Berries are eaten by birds, the major dispersal agents.

Douglas maple

Acer glabrum • Aceraceae

This spreading tall shrub is widely distributed from Alaska to California and east to Nebraska. Generally found in moist woods, primarily east of the Cascades in montane zones. This is a facultative upland species rarely. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs in drier forests; it was observed in all impact types except wetlands. Stems are smooth, gray to red, not green. Leaves are up to 12 cm long, cordate and palmately lobed in 3 to 5 segments. Flowers either male or female; female flowers less than 1 cm wide, arrayed in clusters. Samaras (fruits) are 3 cm long with prominent wings. Dispersal is by wind as seeds twist and glide away from parent plant.

Sitka alder

Alnus viridis (*crispus*) ssp. *sinuata* • Betulaceae

This multi-stemmed, sprawling shrub occurs throughout the Pacific Northwest to western Montana, north through western Canada, into Alaska and south to northern California. It is common in avalanche chutes, moist lahars, stream sides and glacial forelands. It is a facultative wetland species that on Mount St. Helens is found in the blown-down zone, wetlands and all primary succession sites. It can reach 4 m in protected sites, where it can form impenetrable thickets. Leaves are deciduous, alternate, thin, up to 10 cm long, margins that are both wavy and doubly serrated, rounded below and pointed at the tip. Male flowers form elongated catkins, female catkins develop into cones 2 cm long that are grouped in small clusters, enclosing winged nutlets. Dispersal is by wind, with wings helping nutlets to glide, and by water.

Red elderberry

Sambucus racemosa • Caprifoliaceae

This common tall shrub is abundant in forests and disturbed areas throughout North America except the far north and the southeast U.S. It often occurs in clear cuts and deciduous forests. Around Mount St. Helens, this facultative upland species occurs mostly along forest margins, the blown-down zone and refugia, but seedlings can occur on primary surfaces. Branches are red-brown with a soft center and prominent lenticels that give it look lumpy. Leaves are pinnately compound into 5-7 lanceolate, serrate leaflets that reach 12 cm long. Flowers are white or creamy, tiny and congregated in dense terminal clusters. Fruits are bright red berries, 5 mm wide, each with about 3 seeds. While fruits taste bitter, birds avidly consume them and therefore are responsible for dispersal.

Pinemat manzanita

Arctostaphylos nevadensis • Ericaceae

An evergreen shrub that spreads vigorously by prostrate stems, it is scattered in chaparral and open dry forests of the Pacific coastal states and Nevada. It is a common ground layer species in pine forests. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs occasionally in refugia near lahars, in the blown-down zone and in all primary sites. It is prominent on the Muddy River lahar deposit. The bark is a bright red-brown. Leaves are alternate, thick, persistent, oval, with a pointed tip, shiny on top, dull grey-green below. Flowers white or pinkish, 5 mm long, urn-shaped, drooping, found in a few-flowered, terminal cluster. Fruits are bright red berries about 8 mm round, containing several seeds; persistent on plant through winter. Fruits attract birds, which are the principal dispersers.

Fool's huckleberry

Menziesia ferruginea • Ericaceae

This deciduous, rather ungainly shrub occurs in moist montane habitats from Alaska to northern California and in the northern Rockies. This is a facultative upland species. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs in dense forests of the tephra zone, in the blown-down zone and refugia. The plant can reach 2 m in height, with hirsute stems. Leaves alternate, more common near the tips of branches; thin, 5 cm long, light green, with brown hairs on ovate leaves that have a pointed tip and finely serrate margins. Flowers form drooping clusters on older shoots; corolla pink to a characteristic salmon color, urn-shaped, 7 mm long. Fruits are dry capsules about 6 mm long, which open to drop their seeds, which may tumble along the ground.

Pink mountain-heath

Phyllodoce empetriformis • Ericaceae

This low perennial, evergreen shrub occurs in open conifer forests and dryer subalpine meadows from Alaska to California in the Sierra-Cascades ranges, and in the Olympics, and east to the northern Rockies. It is a facultative upland species. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs in open moist forests (rather straggly) and tephra meadows and has invaded lahars, pumice and pyroclastic habitats. Plants can form dense mats up to 40 cm tall; colonies appear to live indefinitely. Leaves are narrowly linear, alternate, long-lived about 12 mm long and sharply pointed (resembling a conifer needle). Flowers are borne singly from terminal shoots; petals are deep pink and are fused into bell-shaped urn about 7 mm long; the lobes roll back. Fruits are small round capsules that expel tiny seeds that then may be moved by wind, water and gravity.

Cascade azalea

Rhododendron albiflorum • Ericaceae

This deciduous shrub occurs at mid to high elevations in the Cascades, from British Columbia and Alberta to Oregon and east to Colorado and Montana. It occupies the understory of moist coniferous forests. It is a facultative upland species. On Mount St. Helens, it occurs in tephra impacted forests at higher elevations and is common in the blown-down zone. It is found in a few refugia. Plant grows up to 2 m tall, developing from rhizomes; twigs covered with coarse reddish hairs. Leaves are alternate, are oblong to lanceolate, broader near the tip, clusters and tending to be yellow green in color, turning bronze to crimson during senescence; they are 6-8 cm long on short stalks. Flowers cluster in small groups in the axils; they are white, showy cups on 1 cm long stalks. Fruits are dry capsules covered in short hairs; seeds are released to tumble about.

Thin leaf black huckleberry

Vaccinium membranaceum • Ericaceae

This common deciduous shrub is found from British Columbia to California and east to the Great Lakes, primarily in coniferous forests and open slopes up to mid-elevations. This facultative upland species is common at higher elevations within the tephra zone and in moist forests on the south side of the mountain. It forms dense thickets above tree line on the east side of Mount St. Helens and is common in refugia within the blast zone. Seedlings occur on lahars and pumice if mature populations are nearby. It usually forms large colonies; with plants reaching 1.5 m or more. Twigs are smooth, angled and yellow-green. Leaves are alternate and thin, lance-shaped or more elliptic, tapering to a point; margins are finely dentate. Flowers occur on stalks that are 5-10 mm long in leaf axils; corolla is urn-shaped, pink to creamy colored. Fruit is a delicious black to purple berry. Note: several other huckleberries are common in the forests of Mount St. Helens, including the oval-leaf huckleberry (*V. ovalifolium*) and red huckleberry (*V. parvifolium*).